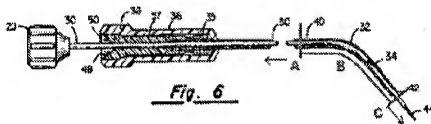


REMARKS

Claims 1-4, 8-12, 16-20, and 24-27 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Dutcher (US 4,381,013). The office action characterizes Dutcher as having a taper zone extending from within a curved intermediate segment based upon inclusion of the entire portion identified as segment B:



Only point C to the tip is considered to be a substantially straight distal segment. However, as is plainly shown, the portion of segment B immediately proximal to point C is in fact straight. The mischaracterization of Dutcher serves as the predicate for the contention that the exterior profile at point 42, where there is an abrupt decrease in diameter, constitutes a taper that originates in the curved section.

In the response to Applicant's previous arguments, the office action acknowledges that the construction of the term "taper" adopted by Applicant is only a portion having a gradual, uniform decrease in diameter. However, the office action goes on to place a broader construction on the term "taper" that includes merely a decrease in diameter as exists at point 42 in Dutcher.

Applicant believes that the proper construction of the term “taper” according to its plain and ordinary meaning is a gradual, uniform decrease in diameter. Therefore, Applicant has amended independent claims 1 and 17 to recite that the taper zone extending within the curved intermediate segment has a gradual, uniform decrease in diameter. Given this clarification as to the construction of the term “taper,” Dutcher clearly fails to anticipate the claims.

Further, the combination of Dutcher and Hartley necessarily fails to render obvious the claimed subject matter of claims 5-7, 13-15, 21-23 and 28-30. Dutcher cannot provide the base reference to combine with Hartley to result in a viable

obviousness rejection. The combination of Dutcher and Hartley fails to result in a structure having all the features set forth in the amended independent claims.

Applicant respectfully submits that the claims are in proper form and condition for allowance, and requests that a notice of allowance issue in due course.

Respectfully submitted,

March 15, 2007
Date

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